



Verena Street Coffee Company

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Many people pay homage to the street where they grew up by making it an answer to their computer's password retrieval question. Cousins Eric and Michael Gantz turned theirs into a coffee brand. Back in the day, Verena Street was located not far from the Gantz's current business facility near the intersection of Hwy. 52 and Northwest Arterial in Dubuque. The street where Eric and Michael once rode their bikes has since been removed for highway expansion, but, for them, the nostalgia of the street lives on in every bag of Verena Street Coffee.

Eric and Michael Gantz are fourth-generation descendants of beverage entrepreneurs; their great-grandfather started Dubuque's Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company that is still family-owned. Stemming from their family history of

self-starters, Eric and Michael knew they too had the entrepreneurial spirit.

"Eric and I always knew we wanted to do something together," Michael said. "The soft drink industry isn't quite what it used to be, so we wanted something we could pass along to future generations."

That "something" became Roasting Solutions, LLC, in January 2011, doing business as Verena Street Coffee Company. The majority of the coffee beans used in Verena Street Coffee are Rainforest Alliance Certified, meaning the coffee is harvested from farms that support a healthy environment, promote the well-being of workers and their communities, and ensure efficient farm methods. Certification ensures the protection of wildlife habitat, water, and soil.

New shipments of Verena Street Coffee's Arabica beans are ordered every six to eight weeks, originating from about 12 different countries at any given time. The Gantz's roast, blend, package, and distribute their specialty coffee at their facility in Dubuque, craft roasting the coffee in small batches. The roasting equipment handles four batches of beans per hour

at about 132-152 pounds per batch, and also helps keep each blend tasting like it should. Verena Street Coffee uses high-quality beans that produce a smooth, high-quality taste with a subtle caffeine effect.

Like all entrepreneurs, the cousins were happy to see their product first move off the shelves. They started selling Verena Street Coffee in local HyVee and Fareway grocery stores; now, their coffee can be found in over 330 grocery stores, club stores, warehouse stores, and mass merchandisers mostly throughout the Midwest.

Despite challenges involved in perfecting the blends, running a business, and trying to persuade loyal Folgers drinkers to stray, the Gantz's said they have a great fan-base and consumer feedback has been "99.8 percent" positive. Since its appearance a few years ago, the Verena Street Coffee brand has experienced 70 to 100 percent growth in sales every year. With the last quarter of 2013 looking to be their best yet, the cousins say they plan to recruit more help in addition to their three full-time and four part-time employees at Roasting Solutions.



BUY LOCAL.

The Gantz's' history with the beverage distribution business proves advantageous when it comes to connecting with stores and merchandisers, but that doesn't mean they haven't been turned down. The Gantz's say the most challenging part of the business is convincing major companies to sell their product.

"It will take some luck [to get] a big player to believe in us. But each selling place is a steppingstone," Eric said. "Stores might say no today, but with some persistence, they might eventually say yes."

Even though they have aspirations to attract coffee drinkers on a national level, the cousins say it's important to them to make Dubuquers proud and prove to the naysayers that a high quality coffee can be produced here in Iowa. They pay tribute to their Dubuque heritage in the various blends of coffee with names such as Lock and Dam 11, Julien's Breakfast Blend, Shot Tower Espresso, and their most popular flavored coffee, Mississippi Grogg.

Before Verena Street Coffee, Michael admits he wasn't much of a coffee drinker and Eric wasn't either, preferring his java with several teaspoons of sugar. Nowadays, they don't start their day without a cup of their brew – without any cream, sugar, or donut to go along. They insist the coffee itself is a very rewarding culinary experience.

Follow Verena Street Coffee on Facebook or check out www.verenastreet.com to purchase coffee online, find the perfect roast based on your preferences, or join the Verena Street Coffee Club. ❖



Eric (left) and Michael Gantz (right) are fourth-generation descendants of beverage entrepreneurs.

